

Hawthorne's Domestic Quest Narratives of the 1830s

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In a letter to the New York editors Cornelius Mathews and Evert Duyckinck on December 22, 1841, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote analytically of his career up to that time.

I do not believe that I shall ever write any more—at least, not like my past productions; for they grew out of the quietude and seclusion of my former life; and there is little probability that I shall ever be so quiet and secluded again. During the past three or four years, the world has sucked me within its vortex; and I could not get back to my solitude again, even if I would.¹

Hawthorne's "solitude" in the 12 years of his writing career before publication of *Twice-Told Tales* (1837) has often been an issue for biographers and critics, but much less attention has been paid to the kind of distinction that Hawthorne predicts here between the tales of the twenties and thirties and his later work. The period he designates—up to about 1838—was a distinct phase, however, as scholars have recently, if somewhat differently, argued.² As Hawthorne's autobiographical self-analysis quite accurately predicts, it is a period that needs to be studied as distinct from the very different phases which followed. We have often treated his short fiction as if all of a piece, ignoring the different times of creation of individual tales. Isolating the fiction of his "solitary" period,

¹ Dated Boston, December 22, 1841. *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, Vol. XV, *The Letters, 1813-1843*, ed. Thomas Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), p. 600. Hereafter, all quotations from the writings of Hawthorne will be from the Centenary Edition and will be cited by volume and page numbers in parentheses.

² Nina Baym, *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), and Michael Colacurcio, *The Province of Piety: Moral History in Hawthorne's Early Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), passim. Rita K. Gollin also claims that, starting in 1838, Hawthorne's narrators begin to reflect "a more complex writer," *Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Truth of Dreams* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 86.

however, enables us to bring into focus motifs and preoccupations that particularly characterize his work in its earliest phases.

One such striking characteristic appears in the conjunction of formal and thematic patterns in a significant cluster of writings in the period of his work on the collection he intended to call *The Story Teller* and slightly beyond. Up until about 1838 he produced recurrent examples, at all levels of artistic achievement and in all the modes in which he wrote, of a type of narrative that largely disappears from his work for most of the forties, returning in altered but recognizable form in the last 15 years of his career. This pattern involves two essential elements: a version of the traditional quest narrative and a potentially contradictory but nevertheless pronounced thematic emphasis on the ultimate value of home. This is often accompanied by a stress on region: rural New England is most often seen as the location promising happiness for those who actively seek it—and such questers are legion in Hawthorne's early fiction. There is of course something essentially paradoxical in the joining of the quest, which carries one away from home, with a thematic stress on the central importance of a domestic center in one's life. Yet it is precisely this combination that appears repeatedly. It is hardly original with Hawthorne, having been present in *The Odyssey* and recurring in various guises ever since,³ though it does take a distinctly Hawthornean shape.

One work by Hawthorne epitomizes the pattern most clearly, perhaps because it is so simply expressed, but its central elements are replicated in many others. In fact, "The Threefold Destiny: A Faëry Legend" is later than almost all the others—probably too late ever to have been imagined as part of *The Story Teller*.⁴ It was published in the *American Monthly Magazine* in March 1838, too late for inclusion in the first edition of *Twice-Told Tales*, though it acquired a prominent position as the final story in the second edition (1842). A brief review of its contents will be helpful.

As the tale begins, Ralph Cranfield has just completed a 10-year quest for "three marvellous events," which he firmly believed were to be "confirmed to him by three signs" (IX, 473). This "threefold destiny"

³ *The Wizard of Oz* is an interesting case in point. For a discussion of the conjunction of the quest and the domestic theme in this novel, see Linda Hansen, "Experiencing the World as Home: Reflections on Dorothy's Quest in *The Wizard of Oz*," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 67 (Spring 1984): 91-102.

⁴ Scholars disagree on this point. Nelson Adkins, in his important article on Hawthorne's early work, said Hawthorne "possibly" intended "The Threefold Destiny" for *The Story Teller* ("The Early Projected Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 39 [1945]: 139), but Baym decidedly rejects it as too late, saying, "I do not accept in *The Story Teller* any material published in other magazines than the *New England/American Monthly Magazine*, or even published there after 1836," p. 40.

would include the love of a beautiful woman, “a mighty treasure hidden somewhere in the earth,” and “the attainment of extensive influence and sway over his fellow-creatures” (IX, 474): love, wealth, and power. The discovery of each of these rewards would be signaled by a physical sign: (1) a jewel in the shape of a heart, which the woman would be wearing on her breast; (2) “a hand, the fore-finger pointing downward, and beneath it the Latin word EFFODE—Dig!” which would mark the place of the treasure; and (3) three “messengers” who would arrive to call Cranfield to his position of great earthly power. Ralph, we learn, has traveled through “the jungles of Hindustan,” under “the suns of Spain,” in “the red-hot wind of an Arabian desert,” and amidst “the frozen breath of an Arctic region”; he has sojourned “amid wild and dangerous men” and has even stuck his ataghan “into the throat of a Turkish robber” (IX, 472-73). Yet his “proud fate” has remained elusive. He returns, travel-worn, “to his mother’s cottage. . . . trusting that his weary manhood would regain somewhat of the elasticity of youth in the spot where his threefold fate had been foreshown him” (IX, 475). Little has changed in the village of his childhood, so that “it seemed scarcely more than if Ralph Cranfield had gone forth that very morning, and dreamed a day-dream till the twilight, and then turned back again.” There is no doubt, however, that he has been gone for many years because “the village did not remember him as he remembered the village” (IX, 475). After the manner of the folk and fairy tales on which this “faëry legend” is loosely modeled, “Rip Van Winkle” surely among them, Hawthorne’s protagonist quickly proceeds to discover in his own village each of the three foreseen signs. After relating each discovery in turn, climaxed by Ralph’s reunion with his childhood friend, Faith Egerton, Hawthorne summarizes as he concludes his tale:

To find the mysterious treasure, he was to till the earth around his mother’s dwelling, and reap its products! Instead of warlike command, or regal or religious sway, he was to rule over village children [as school master]! And now the visionary Maid had faded from his fancy, and in her place he saw the playmate of his childhood! Would all, who cherish such wild wishes, but look around them, they would oftenest find their sphere of duty, or prosperity, and happiness, within those precincts, and in that station where Providence itself has cast their lot. Happy they who read the riddle without a weary world-search, or a lifetime spent in vain! (IX, 481-82)

One could hardly find anywhere in the Hawthorne canon a purer statement of nineteenth-century domestic ideology than we find in this story. Thomas Carlyle had insisted on the moral appropriateness of “doing the duty which lies nearest,” of valuing the things and the people that are closest to one’s natural condition and surroundings. It was an ideology to which the democratic America of the 1830s was particularly

attracted. Maxine Van de Wetering recently asserted that nineteenth-century writers, "in their habit of viewing life in dichotomies . . . captured the distinctiveness between the inside life of tranquility, sympathetic nurture, honor, and permanence natural to humanity, and the outside life of glamor, which was temporary and artificial, and unnatural to innocent human beings, especially Americans."⁵ William Spengemann and Eric Sundquist have recently explored this dichotomy in selected works of Hawthorne and others, and John McWilliams has likewise commented on it.⁶ And the American social historian, John Demos, in a statement that conjures up immediate associations in the tales and novels of Hawthorne, observes that "For those who absorbed the imagery of Home the moment of leaving was charged with extraordinary tension. To cross the sacred threshold from inside to outside was to risk unspeakable dangers. The nostalgia, the worries, the guilt which attended such crossings are threaded through an enormous mass of domestic fiction from the period."⁷

Hawthorne in his early years as a writer was developing a full awareness of popular taste, including the domestic narrative, which became increasingly prominent from the appearance of Catharine Sedgwick's first novels in the mid 1820s. Nor was he above writing to please this popular taste on occasion.⁸ His fiction was, perforce, part of that "enormous mass" of literature dealing with domestic issues to which Demos refers. Indeed, his particular formulation of the domestic theme very often summarizes popular assumptions more effectively than much of the work of his contemporaries. An immensely popular work by Hawthorne's younger acquaintance and lifelong admirer, James Russell

⁵ Maxine Van de Wetering, "The Popular Concept of 'Home' in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American Studies*, 18 (1984): 18.

⁶ Spengemann, in *The Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), demonstrates the tension in American fiction between a "poetics of adventure" and a "poetics of domesticity." His chapter on Hawthorne uses as an epigraph the passage I have quoted from "The Threefold Destiny," though he makes no mention of the tale in his discussion. Sundquist, in *Home as Found: Authority and Genealogy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), claims that "the link between the sentimental cult of the family and the Edenic ideal in Nature made the yoking of the two inevitable as a powerful field for the work of the literary imagination," p. xv. McWilliams, in *Hawthorne, Melville, and the American Character* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), offers an excellent concise discussion of the conservative Hawthornean tendency in the earlier fiction to value the domestic hearth over the "westerling spirit of free, solitary men," p. 93.

⁷ Demos, "Images of the American Family, Then and Now" in *Changing Images of the Family*, ed. Virginia Tufte and Barbara Myerhoff (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 54.

⁸ Both Colacurcio and Baym recognize this tendency, and Baym argues, too, that Hawthorne had an unfortunately limited—and uninformed—sense of who his potential audience was. See Baym, pp. 63-64; Colacurcio, pp. 496-97.

Lowell, dramatically demonstrates how precisely Hawthorne had identified a motif that was capable of acquiring a very great popularity. Lowell's pseudo-Arthurian poem, "The Vision of Sir Launfal," written and published in 1848, a whole decade after the publication of "The Threefold Destiny," and republished every Christmas season for several years, tells essentially the same story as Hawthorne's tale, though Lowell gives it a specifically Christian message, which doubtless guaranteed its popularity as a Christmas "myth." Lowell's Sir Launfal is a quester for the Holy Grail, though his quest, unlike Ralph Cranfield's, occurs in a dream on a single June night. As he sets out from his castle, Launfal shuns a leper who is begging for alms at his castle gate, callously tossing him "a piece of gold in scorn."⁹ After questing for many years, Launfal returns one Christmas-tide, "An old, bent man, worn out and frail" (110). Like Cranfield, he has traveled "O'er the edge of the desert," passing "over the red-hot sands" to many exotic sites (110). He finds the leper beggar still crouched at "his own hard gate," though Launfal's castle is now in someone else's possession and his wealth is totally gone. Chastened by his journeys and his poverty, Sir Launfal now offers the leper "a mouldy crust of coarse brown bread" and "water out of a wooden bowl." Miraculously, the leper suddenly stands "before him glorified" and the castle gate is transformed into "the Gate whereby men can/ Enter the temple of God in Man" (110). The wooden bowl, moreover, proves to be the Grail for which he had been searching the world over. Having thus like Ralph Cranfield found the ultimate treasure at his very front door, Sir Launfal awakens from his dream.

It is important to grasp the central similarity between the two tales; both Hawthorne's and Lowell's tales argue that the primary goals of life can best be encountered and obtained in one's familiar environs. The chief treasures of life are the homely ones and fulfillment is best achieved by valuing home and neighbor, which, if seen truly, are worth far more than any imagined destinies in distant places. Extending the gestures of love and service to one's nearest neighbors, moreover, is potentially the most heroic act one can make, but also the surest way to happiness. It was a common message in the first half of the nineteenth century, repeated especially in the works of many women writers. For Lowell it even had aesthetic implications, as he revealed in his 1843 review of Hawthorne's *Historical Tales*, where he wrote, "Like a true genius, [Hawthorne] has made his own heart the centre from which all his

⁹ *The Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell*, Cambridge Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), p. 108. Hereafter, all quotations from "The Vision of Sir Launfal" will be from this edition and cited parenthetically.

artistic power has emanated, and found his materials around his very door.”¹⁰

Three stories from this earliest period all very pointedly suggest Hawthorne's preoccupation with the problem of the need to break with home, to enter an adventurous search in the outside world for something missing in one's life, in the end discovering the ultimate and indeed matchless value of the domestic setting. In two of these three instances, however, the discovery comes too late, producing tragic consequences. This narrative and thematic pattern was a resource that was fundamental for Hawthorne, the basis alternatively for some of his most powerfully “dark” tales and for his often mawkishly sentimental “light” ones. “Young Goodman Brown,” for instance, relates the archetypal tale of youth's encounter with the dark side of human experience. The young newlywed, Goodman Brown, despite his wife Faith's special pleas, insists that the night has come when he has no choice but to keep a rendezvous in the dark forest of his own soul with Satan. He is led, presumably as much by his own need to know as by any outside force, to the heart of darkness, where his experience turns out to be more than he had bargained for. He returns, an emotional cripple, capable of achieving the worldly signs of a successful public and family life, but nevertheless irrevocably altered by an experience he simply was not equipped to handle. Inwardly, he turns homeward, frantically desiring to repossess the pure Faith of the pink ribbons. On his return, he is welcomed by the unchanged Faith, but his own heart now contains a darkness that shuts out much of the light which she formerly brought to it. The reader sees that life before the fall was happier for Brown, but there is no going back to that “home” again. This loss of home accounts, in large part, for the tragic quality of the tale's conclusion.

Works less admired today than “Young Goodman Brown” are equally telling in a consideration of Hawthorne's merging of the quest motif with his domestic theme. An even more dramatic case, in fact, is “The Ambitious Guest,” where the unnamed youthful protagonist has “a high and abstracted ambition.” In a vocabulary identical to Ralph Cranfield's, he states his belief that “I cannot die till I have achieved my destiny” (IX, 328). The similarity to Cranfield in his role as dedicated quester is unmistakable: “He had travelled far and alone; his whole life, indeed, had been a solitary path” (IX, 327). When he arrives at the cabin in the notch of the White Mountains, bound from the Saco Valley for Burlington, Vermont, “and . . . beyond” (IX, 326), he is warmly greeted by

¹⁰ *The Pioneer*, 1 (1843): 41-42; repr. in *Hawthorne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J. Donald Crowley (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1970), pp. 72-73.

the family seated around the domestic hearth. "In the household of the Notch, he found warmth and simplicity of feeling, the pervading intelligence of New-England, and a poetry of native growth, which they had gathered, when they little thought of it, from the mountain-peaks and chasms, and at the very threshold of their romantic and dangerous abode" (IX, 327). When the youth's ardor over his hopes for achieving his "destiny" makes him self-consciously aware of how "ludicrous" he may look to this family, he takes the eldest daughter's hand, betraying his susceptibility to the attractions of domestic values, while she observes, in another version of Faith Brown's argument, that rather than questing for an obscure destiny, "It is better to sit here, by this fire . . . and be comfortable and contented, though nobody thinks about us" (IX, 328). But Hawthorne kills off the unnamed—and subsequently unknown—quester before he can grant the truth of the girl's homely wisdom. No doubt significantly, they are destroyed when they flee from the home, which remains inviolate despite its seeming vulnerability.

Two years later, in 1837, making full use of these motifs, Hawthorne published an even more explicitly moral tale. "The Great Carbuncle" depicts, not a solitary quester, but eight, including especially the young married couple, Hannah and Matthew. Each of these eight individuals has reasons, clearly reflecting his or her own values, for seeking the fabled jewel in the White Mountains. Most are seeking wealth, power, or at least fame in some form. The consequences of the quest are various, including the death of the Seeker, the permanent blindness of the Cynic, and satisfaction with lesser prizes than the carbuncle for others like the poet. While some of the questers never see it at all, and others are destroyed by the sight of it, Matthew and Hannah actually find the great carbuncle but reject it, showing themselves, as the narrator says, "so simply wise, as to reject a jewel which would have dimmed all earthly things" (IX, 165). They return, at Hannah's urging, to their "humble cottage." Rather than have their lives outshone by the splendor of the mountain jewel, Matthew says, "We will kindle the cheerful glow of our hearth, at eventide, and be happy in its light" (IX, 163).¹¹

As these examples suggest, Hawthorne employed the combination of the quest with the return to a newly appreciated domestic setting in works at all levels of his artistic range. It would have been a major theme and a recurrent formal pattern in *The Story Teller*, had that collection not

¹¹ This story had a particular appeal to contemporary values and was praised by both Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Elizabeth Peabody in their reviews of *Twice-Told Tales* (1837). See Thomas Woodson, "Introduction" to Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Letters, 1813-1843*, ed. Woodson, L. Neal Smith, and Norman Holmes Pearson, The Centenary Edition, Vol. XV (Columbus: Ohio State University Press), p. 45, fn. 76.

been broken up for piecemeal publication by Park Benjamin in 1834-35. It remained a preoccupation, however, for three or four more years.¹² This preoccupation is reflected, also, in Hawthorne's Notebook for 1837, the year of "The Great Carbuncle." There, he sketched the idea that a young man and woman "meet together, each in search of a person to be known by some particular sign. They watch and wait a great while for that person to pass. At last some casual circumstance discloses that each is the one the other is waiting for. Moral—that what we need for our happiness is often close at hand, if we but knew how to seek for it" (VIII, 153).

This explicit "moral" had already been behind numerous of his works and would be behind "The Threefold Destiny" the very next year. But the essential ingredients of these works reappear in many works from the thirties. A story published just two months after "The Ambitious Guest" in the same *New England Magazine* and also originally intended for *The Story Teller*, "The Vision of the Fountain," contains some of the same elements—a searching young man away from home whose "vision" of a beautiful young woman becomes his obsession. After futilely searching for her in the external world, this incipient artist withdraws into himself and lets his imagination take over. He imagines "a romance" with himself as hero and with a happy ending, which then in fact comes true when he ultimately locates the object of both his dreams and his worldly quest at a rural household hearth. In this instance, the fear that the dreamt-of prize might prove only visionary after all is unfounded. But the quest is concluded satisfactorily only by turning back to the domestic circle, where threatened alienation from love and communion can be set permanently aside and where, if anywhere, "romance" and reality can join.

The sketches of this period likewise occasionally reveal the same conjunction of elements, necessarily simplified. The most obvious case is perhaps "Night Sketches: Under an Umbrella," but it is in "The Village Uncle" (*The Token*, 1835), not itself an example of the quest motif, that Hawthorne's narrator provides a summary statement of domestic values: "In chaste and warm affections, humble wishes, and honest toil for some

¹² Beginning in November 1834 and continuing through 1835, tales and sketches intended for the carefully planned *Story Teller* appeared separately in the *New England Magazine* and, starting at the end of 1835 and extending into 1836, in the *American Monthly Magazine*, both of which were edited by Benjamin. See Adkins, pp. 132-33, and Seymour L. Gross, "Four Possible Additions to Hawthorne's 'Story Teller,'" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 51 (1957), 90-95.

useful end, there is health for the mind, and quiet for the heart, the prospect of a happy life, and the fairest hope of Heaven" (IX, 323).

But it is in the tales of the period that this motif is most clearly and strongly emphasized. There are of course still more from the thirties that fit the pattern. Three works that are among our major classroom warhorses, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," "Roger Malvin's Burial," and "Wakefield," offer very clear examples. In "My Kinsman," the young man's archetypal quest for independence is permanently outward, and indeed it is Robin who makes the fullest transition of any of these early characters from his childhood home into a new home in the larger world. He comes close to giving up and heading home in defeat, but is saved from making the return journey to disillusionment, as did Goodman Brown, by the friendly stranger who suggests Robin may yet rise in the world. Reuben Bourne, on the other hand, heads home after his adventures, only to seek in vain for the domestic happiness that beckons; guilt undermines domestic bliss for Bourne just as fully as for Brown. "Wakefield," a fascinating mixture of the comic and the tragic, is in a sense the underside of "The Threefold Destiny." It tells of an aimless protagonist who desecrates the sanctity of the home first in his casual desertion of it and last by taking it for granted in his thoughtlessly blithe return after a 20-year absence. He is far from understanding the lesson that Cranfield eventually learns, but Hawthorne's ironic exposure of his folly is vividly presented. Thus, there is considerable variety in Hawthorne's plots and characters in these tales, but whether or not the characters are praiseworthy in their attitude toward home, the value of that concept is constant in Hawthorne's themes.

The Story Teller would have ended, as Nelson Adkins first explained, with "Fragments from the Journal of a Solitary Man," which was instead published in the *American Monthly Magazine* for July 1837. The final section of the "Fragments" is subtitled "My Home Return," and relates Oberon's description of his reunion with his native village after many disillusioning years away. Like Ralph Cranfield, he has come to the hard realization that his dreams of a great destiny in the world beyond were illusory: "How had I misinterpreted that augury, the ghost of hope, with none of hope's bright hues" (XI, 323). Then it occurs to him that "some youth . . . now at the crisis of his fate, might have felt his bosom thrill at my example, and be emulous of my wild life and worthless fame. But I would save him. . . . I will beseech him not to follow an eccentric path, nor, by stepping aside from the highway of human affairs, to relinquish his claim upon human sympathy" (XI, 326-27).

What bears emphasizing is that there is a concentration on the theme of the quest for values that ends at one's own gate or threshold in the

important period from approximately 1829 to about 1838, which was central to Hawthorne's thinking. He more or less deserted the theme through most of the 1840s, but by December of 1848, when he began writing "Ethan Brand" (and just when Lowell was conceiving "Sir Launfal"), the questing hero on the circular path away from home and back again was again on his mind.¹³ And in the major romances thereafter, the motif is present in one way or another. It is possible to see even *The Scarlet Letter* as a domestic narrative whose dramatic tensions can only be resolved by the uniting of the three family members in the symbolic final scene of hand grasping and kissing on the scaffold. *The House of the Seven Gables* attempts a comedic answer to the darkness of family fragmentation in the previous book. And *Blithedale* begins explicitly as a group quest for new domestic communion.¹⁴

Edgar Dryden approaches this issue biographically when he writes in his final chapter, "Hawthorne . . . is a man whose central and repeated experience is one of exile and dispersion from a number of temporary homes; and that experience, moreover, is centrally related to his career as a writer. His fiction is, of course, filled with homeless characters who seek recognition and reconciliation."¹⁵ Yet, though Dryden mentions Robin Molineux, Giovanni Guasconti, and Ethan Brand in this connection, he is interested chiefly in Hawthorne's later works, the novels, both finished and unfinished, and he does not seek to distinguish among the works in relation to different phases of Hawthorne's career.¹⁶

There are certainly biographical reasons why this subject of the value of home and the apparently mixed feelings about the need both to break from it and to remain attached to it should have been strong during the period of Hawthorne's extended "solitude." Living in his mother's home more than a decade after receiving his college degree, he still had not broken from that home nor had he completed the quest for a home of his

¹³ As Arlin Turner has pointed out, in writing "Ethan Brand" Hawthorne drew on Notebook entries from the summer of 1838. *Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 113-14.

¹⁴ It is probably not a mere coincidence that in a letter from this phase of his career, as he and his family prepared to move to the Wayside in Concord, he wrote that "Since I was married, ten years ago, I have had no less than seven homes—the one to which I am now going being the eighth," Letter to G. P. Putnam, dated West Newton, April 14, 1852 (XVI, 530).

¹⁵ *Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Poetics of Enchantment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 147.

¹⁶ Eric Sundquist, who cites this passage in Dryden's work, brings similar insights to bear particularly on *The House of the Seven Gables* without exploring the high concentration of this concern in the tales of the mid thirties. See Sundquist, pp. 86-142.

own.¹⁷ His meeting with Sophia Peabody in late 1837 and their eventual marriage and temporary settlement in Concord accomplished this break, and may well account for the diminished frequency in his stories of the 1840s of dislocated questers for home like Ralph Cranfield, Reuben Bourne, Goodman Brown, Oberon, and the others.¹⁸ But the domestic values espoused in these early tales remained fundamental to his writing for the rest of his career, and, if anything, were gaining new strength in the early 1860s.¹⁹ His *Our Old Home* bears a title that attests to the personal importance of the quest for home for him at this time, and the fragment in which he was trying to find fictional form for this quest once again, "The Ancestral Footstep," certainly echoes the motif of "The Ambitious Guest" and other early Hawthornean quest narratives: The protagonist's search for his English origins is compared to a search for "Eve's bridal bower, the birth-place of the human race and all its glorious possibilities of happiness and high performance (XII, 3)," ²⁰ which is clearly a more expressly mythic postulation of a very familiar quest.

Thus, in its points of similarity to a large body of related material, "The Threefold Destiny" acquires a somewhat larger significance than we might have assigned it otherwise. Ralph's is a case of the quester learning before it is too late. He returns to embrace his Faith and to live with her in fulfillment of all life's promise, unlike his New England neighbor, Goodman Brown, whose Faith takes him back but whose embrace gives her cold comfort. In attempting to know what to make of a moral, even moralistic, tale like "The Threefold Destiny," we might usefully recall Melville's review of *Mosses*. He had a more balanced view of Hawthorne than many have given him credit for; surely influenced, as Thomas Woodson has recently suggested, by Evert Duyckinck's review of five

¹⁷ Gloria Erlich has written especially well on this subject in *Family Themes in Hawthorne's Fiction: The Tenacious Web* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984); see especially chapter 3.

¹⁸ Writing to his "wife," as he called Sophia long before their marriage, he laments her absence, saying that because of it, "the soul of home is wanting," ironically picturing himself as a homeless quester: "A much-to-be-pitied husband am I, naughty wife—a homeless man—a wanderer in the desert of this great city; picking up a precarious subsistence wherever I happen to find a restaurateur or an oyster-shop—and returning at night to a lonely fireside and a lonely pillow. . . . It is a sore trial to your husband to be estranged from that which makes life a reality to him" (Boston, December 18, 1839, XVI, 387).

¹⁹ Colacurcio's brief observation that "about 1849 Hawthorne's thematic 'career' began to recapitulate itself" (p. 661) is, I think, quite accurate and is certainly borne out in the reemergence of the quest-for-home motif in works of this period such as "Ethan Brand," "The Great Stone Face," and the major romances, including *The Marble Faun*, where Kenyon and Hilda, like Nathaniel and Sophia in 1860, complete their Italian episode by planning their return to an idyllic New England home.

²⁰ Quoted in Sundquist, p. 102.

years earlier,²¹ Melville observed two halves of Hawthorne's sphere, one in the sunshine, the daylight half, the other shrouded in a "blackness ten times black." He singled out "Young Goodman Brown" as indicating the latter half of this sphere. To represent the brighter half he mentioned another of the *Story Teller* sketches, "Little Annie's Ramble," a tame but recognizable version of the quest narrative. Melville sensed that to mention only one half of Hawthorne's "sphere" was somehow to misrepresent him. Modern readers have been somewhat less circumspect than Melville in this regard. What we need to recognize is that the domestic quest motif is decidedly present in both halves of that sphere—in the darkest, most ominous of his tales and also in the lightest, even the most sentimental ones. This surely helps to explain why he eventually found a certain popularity in his own day, when the domestic narrative was coming to dominate the best-seller lists. His complex, paradoxical view of reality is clearly reflected in his varied handling of the archetypal quest-for-home motif. Here Hawthorne once again shows that he was both a product of his times and an unexcelled interpreter of them.

²¹ See Woodson's "Introduction" to *The Letters, 1813-1843*, XV, 70-71.